

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

# GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

THIS REPORT CONTAINS ASSESSMENTS OF COMMODITY AND TRADE ISSUES MADE BY  
USDA STAFF AND NOT NECESSARILY STATEMENTS OF OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT  
POLICY

Required Report - public distribution

**Date:** 7/13/2011

**GAIN Report Number:** NL1014

## **Netherlands**

### **Agricultural Biotechnology Annual**

#### **Plant and Animal Biotechnology - Annual 2011**

**Approved By:**

Lashonda McLeod

**Prepared By:**

Bob Flach

**Report Highlights:**

This report describes the trade and production of genetically engineered (GE) plant products, the use of GE animals for research purposes, and related government policies in the Netherlands.

## **Section I. Executive Summary:**

The Dutch government and agricultural sector have a pragmatic approach towards the import and use of genetically engineered (GE) agricultural products. Crop trials and commercial cultivation of biotech crops are, however, effectively prevented by cumbersome regulations and by the threat of protests from environmental groups. The Dutch livestock sector depends on feed imports from third countries, mainly soybean meal, which for a major part is GE. The livestock sector does not keep GE animals nor do Dutch agricultural research institutes, for research purposes.

## **Section II. Plant Biotechnology Trade and Production:**

In the Netherlands, there are no commercial plantings of biotech crops and no biotech crops under development are expected to be on the market in the coming year. Field trials are currently conducted with genetically engineered (GE) potatoes. Experimental planting of biotech crops, however, is nearly impossible in the Netherlands. Crop trials are effectively prevented by cumbersome regulations imposed by the government and by the threat protests from environmental groups.

A large share of the Dutch agricultural imports from the United States consists of feed products and requires labeling for biotech content under the European Union's traceability and labeling legislation. The slow approval process of new GE events by the European Union has significantly affected U.S. exports to the Benelux region; in particular corn gluten feed (CGF) and Distillers Dried Grains (DDG).

## **Section III. Plant Biotechnology Policy:**

On November 2, 2004, the Dutch agricultural sector and NGOs jointly presented their coexistence agreement to the Ministry of Agriculture. The sector still needs to reach agreement on the scope of a compensation fund for possible damage to conventional and organic crops, and a monitoring system in the field. Some sector sources believe that the combination of restrictions will practically ban the cultivation of biotech events in the Netherlands.

The Dutch government supports the use of socio-economic criteria for the approval of producing GE products. As such, national Member State regulations should be conclusive, applying socio-economic criteria. For the import of GE products, however, the current EU harmonized regulations should apply. The Dutch government, therefore, opposes a study for the marketing approval for biotech products by the Member State, in addition to the study of the European Union Food Safety Authority. According government officials, the discussion about the use of such criteria should be held on an international level.

## **Section IV. Plant Biotechnology Marketing Issues:**

The Dutch Farmers Organization (LTO) is pragmatic and in favor of planting biotech crops. But points to the resistance of retailers and consumers towards food products containing biotech components, in particular in export markets. The livestock sector depends upon feed imports from third countries, mainly soybean meal, which for a major part is GE. There is no resistance by consumers as this meat produced with biotech feed does not have to be labeled.

In November 2010, the U.S. Grains Council headed a group of U.S. producers and exporters of DDG visiting the Netherlands. The focus of the meetings was to investigate the possibilities to increase exports to the Benelux region. Furthermore, the American Soybean Association is located in the Netherlands and active in this region.

### **Section V. Plant Biotechnology Capacity Building and Outreach:**

FAS The Hague has indentified the following strategy for plant biotechnology capacity building and outreach:

- Maintain contact with host country livestock producers on the problem of feed availability. Serve as a ready source of unbiased, scientific information.
- Promote with host government rational policies concerning adventitious presence of non-approved GE events and the acceptability of meat and dairy products from animals fed with GE feeds.
- Nominate appropriate host country specialists for the International Visitors Leadership Program, and utilize other Public Diplomacy programs.
- Work to get U.S. specialists invited to seminars in host countries. FAS The Hague feels that U.S. farmers, producer groups, academics and scientists, are most qualified to objectively address their views on biotech in crop production and will be listened to by the press and consumers. Arguments by these groups are more difficult for anti-biotech groups to counter.

### **Section VI. Animal Biotechnology:**

In the Netherlands, the genetically engineered bull, Herman, sparked a debate on the desirability of the genetic engineering of animals. This debate led to the introduction of legislation to regulate the application of biotechnology. There are no GE animals used for commercial use. GE animals are authorized for use as laboratory animal for medical research at universities and academic hospitals. Annually, 15 to 20 licenses are granted. The largest group of GE animals is mice. The Dutch livestock sector does not keep GE animals nor do agricultural research institutes keep them for research purposes.

Organizations who want to use GE animals for medical research need to request a license from the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation (ELI). The Animal Experiments Commission (DEC) assesses the incoming license requests for biomedical research experiments. The Dutch Committee on Animal Biotechnology assesses the other incoming license requests. These licenses are granted only if the genetic engineering does not have any unacceptable consequences for the animal's health and welfare. Nor should there be any ethical objections against the proposed

application. The rules for a biotechnology application request are laid down in the Animal Biotechnology Decree. The Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority enforces these regulations. In addition to a license granted by the Minister of Agriculture, institutes or corporations wanting to make, reproduce, keep or transport GE animals also need a license from the Minister of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, who assesses the project's potential adverse effects on humans and the environment. This requirement is based on the Decree on Genetically Modified Organisms.